



HIKING - FOREST SERVICE - ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NATIONAL FOREST – San Juan RANGER DISTRICT - Columbine

Updated: April, 2003

Pine River Trail #523 to Emerald Lake #528 to Moon Lake

Length: 14 mi / 22.5 km

Recommended Season

Spring Summer Fall Winter

Use: Heavy

Difficulty: Moderate

USGS Map (s):

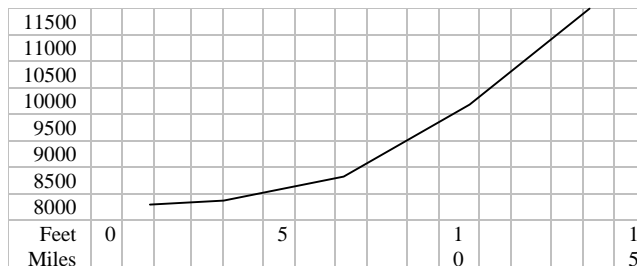
Granite Peak, Emerald Lake

Starting Elevation: 8,000'

Trailhead at Pine River Campground

Ending Elevation: 11,620'

Moon Lake



Access # 1:

From Bayfield, head north on County Road (CR) #501, also called the Vallecito Road. Take that road north 22 miles around Vallecito Reservoir. Turn left on the Pine River turnoff – FS #602. Take the road 3.8 miles to the Pine River Campground.

Access # 2:

From Durango, head north on Florida Road (CR #240) for 14 miles. Continue on CR #240 for 2 miles past the turnoff for Lemon Reservoir. Turn north onto CR #501. Take that road north 12 miles around Vallecito Reservoir. Turn left on the Pine River turnoff – FS #602. Take the road 3.8 miles to the Pine River Campground.

Attractions & Considerations:

The Pine River Trail begins through a private gate next to Granite Peaks Ranch. Please stay on the trail, and camping is prohibited until you reach the Wilderness boundary. Aspens, ponderosa pines, and conifers are in abundance along the trail as you follow the Pine (or Piños) River east.

The boundary of the Weminuche Wilderness is 2.7 miles up the trail. At mile 6.3 the Lake Fork Trail turns off to the north. A moderate climb, interspersed with flat meadows, takes you to the Emerald Lakes at 10 miles. *Within ¼ mile south of the lakes to ½ mile north of the lakes, camping, campfires, and grazing or tethering stock are not allowed, except in designated sites. There are only 8 sites.*

Past Emerald Lake, there are creek crossings, and if it's been a wet year you will have a muddy trail as you climb up the Lake Creek drainage. The alpine meadows are full of blooming wildflowers in late July and in August. Enjoy the excellent views and photographic possibilities. Water can be found off the trail in most of the tributaries, but, due to Giardia, it should be filtered. As with all high-altitude areas, storms can move in rapidly, bringing severe wind, lightning, rain, snow, or hail—at any time of year. Plan accordingly.

Fishing Considerations:

The Pine River is not accessible for the first 2.5 miles of trail, but fishing for trout above the Wilderness boundary is excellent. The Pine River is restricted to artificial flies and lures only. Please check the fishing regulations regarding limits, allowable lures, and restrictions on certain lakes, rivers, etc.

Weminuche Wilderness Regulations:

- Group size is limited to 15 people.
- In the area surrounding Emerald Lake and Little Emerald Lake, camping, campfires, and grazing or restraining stock are not allowed, except in designated sites.
- Camping is not allowed within 100 feet of any water source.
- Outfitter-guides who receive any form of compensation must obtain a special-use permit to operate on public land.
- Possession of motorized equipment and mechanized means of transport are not permitted.
- Recreational livestock are prohibited from being restrained within 100 feet of lakeshores and streams or within riparian areas.



Scan of the San Juan National Forest Map

Forest Service maps and other publications are available at the Public Lands Center, in the Durango Tech Center, ½ mile west of Durango off Highway 160, or by calling (970) 247-4874.

www.sjma.org